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ABSTRACT

This collection of articles includes the following: "Introduction: Volume 13: Meeting the Accountability Challenge" (Maria_Cora); "New Accountability Rules Pose Dilemma for Programs" (Steve Reuys); "Layers, Brushes, and Multi-Lane Highways: Examining Accountability in a Non-Traditional Program" (Marie Cora); "The Adventure Continues" (Janet Kelly); "Authentic Goal Setting with ABE Learners: Accountability for Programs or Process for Learning" (Sally Gabb); "Quinsigamond Community College's Site-Specific Assessment" (Chris Hebert, Anne Burke, Linda Gosselin, and Arpi Hedeshian); "What Works Literacy Partnership: Making Data Work for You" (Diane Rosenthal); and "Analyzing Your Organization's Data to Tell Your Story" (Carol L. Gabler and Heidi L. Fisher). (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (SM)

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adventures IN assessment

volume fifteen

Learner-centered approaches to assessment and evaluation in adult literacy

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spring 2001

adventures IN assessment

Learner-centered approaches to assessment and evaluation in adult literacy

volume thirteen

Editor: Marie Cora *Assistant Editor:* Rick Schwartz *Design:* Marina Blanter

Introduction
Volume 13: Meeting the Accountability Challenge

BY MARIE CORA

In this issue of *Adventures in Assessment*, practitioners and program directors write about their efforts to meet the rising federal and state demands for accountability. The field presently faces layers of challenges: How do we effectively determine adult learners' capabilities? How do we capture learners' progress? How can we use data to inform our practice? How do we construct a system of accountability that examines efforts at the program level?

In an article first written for the *ALRI Newsletter*, **Steve Reuys** sets the stage for us with an overview of the NRS and SMARTT reporting systems. He proceeds to outline three options regarding assessment for the field to meet accountability demands.

I contributed an article that I wrote in my previous position as director of a cluster of volunteer-based literacy programs in Providence, Rhode Island. I was in the process of figuring out ways to fit our very non-traditional programming into the federal and state guidelines mandating certain performance and reporting around assessment and accountability. This was particularly challenging in light of the fact that my program was staffed by non-professional volunteers.

Ten years ago, in the very first issue of *Adventures in Assessment*, **Janet Kelly** wrote about the assessment process developed at the Read/Write/Now Program in Springfield. Janet writes again, reflecting on a decade of learning and reflection, and outlines her program's efforts to involve adult students more fully in programming, and to use assessment to inform learning and teaching, while still meeting the demands of funders.

Sally Gabb examines whether setting goals with adult students is conducted to meet the requirements of the Massachusetts reporting system, SMARTT, or if goal-setting is engaged with students as a process for learning.

Chris Hebert and her colleagues at Quinsigamond Community College share the new ESL placement test they developed to meet the needs of placing students in SPL levels 7 through 10. Both teachers and adult learners were involved in this process.

Two articles look at how data collection can inform and improve program practice, while still satisfying funders and other stakeholders. **Diane Rosenthal** gives us an overview of the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), a nationwide program that brings together 12 adult education programs interested in building their capacity to collect, manage and analyze data. **Carol Gabler** and **Heidi Fisher** provide a case study of their program's participation in WWLP.

The questions raised in the first paragraph of this introduction are questions that I have heard practitioners voice across the state. And as they are asking these tough questions, they are engaging in research, reflection, questioning, and innovation. It's a challenging, but exciting time in our field: we must rise and meet that challenge. We're ready.

Your thoughts and ideas are welcomed and encouraged. If you would like to submit an article or have comments, please feel free to contact me at mcora@worlded.org.

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New Accountability Rules Pose Dilemma for Programs

A version of this article first appeared in the July 2000 ALRI Newsletter.

BY STEVE REUYS

Adult basic education programs in Massachusetts may be faced with some difficult choices these days as they work to comply with the requirements of the new National Reporting System (NRS) and the state's SMARTT data management system. One of these choices involves the assessment and reporting of individual student progress in literacy and language learning. (Other choices revolve around different issues, such as the reporting of individual student goals, but this article will focus on the reporting of students' academic progress.)

As of July 1 [1999], the NRS now requires that each state and hence each federally-funded ABE/ESOL/GED program report the progress of its adult learners in measurable, quantifiable terms, using two "ladders" of six levels each, one built for ESOL and one for literacy/ABE/GED.

In Massachusetts, the state Department of Education (DOE) anticipated this requirement by building into its SMARTT data management system the requirement that programs report student progress for all students. On the ESOL side, this means assessing students in terms of the six Student Performance Levels (SPL) adopted by the NRS for its own reporting. On the ABE side, DOE is requiring that programs report in terms of grade level equivalents (GLEs) from 1 to 12, which DOE will then translate into the six NRS levels for state reporting purposes. Programs are not required to use standardized tests to arrive at these SPLs or GLEs, but if they elect to use an alternative measure, they must correlate the results of this alternative measure with the SPL or GLE ladder and, eventually, provide proof of the validity and reliability of these correlations.

These student assessment requirements, as mandated by the NRS and implemented by SMARTT, can present programs with some difficult choices in how to conduct their assessment processes so as to meet two goals that are at least somewhat in conflict: 1) meeting these new reporting requirements; and 2) providing teachers and students with assessment information that is meaningful, accurate, and useful. This article will review the three basic options that it seems adult basic education programs now have regarding assessment.

The first of these options is for a program simply to use standardized tests for virtually all of its student assessment. The basic advantage of this approach, as everyone knows, is that it is rather easy to do ó not an insignificant reason. I would argue, though, it also carries a number of serious disadvantages. The first is that standardized tests simply do not appear to be very good ways of assessing the reading, writing, and math abilities of students, and especially of adult learners. The literature on this is vast and I won't go into the specifics here, other than to point to the many articles and books written by Susan Lytle, Marcie Wolfe, Marilyn Gillespie, Elsa Auerbach, Peter Johnston,

"These student assessment requirements... can present programs with some difficult choices in how to conduct their assessment process."

and many others over the past two decades or more, criticizing standardized methods of assessing learning and promoting various types of alternative assessment. (Local references would include the Fall 1988 issue of Focus on Basics, and the numerous volumes of Adventures in Assessment published by SABES/World Education. The A.L.R.I. has many resources and lists of resources on alternative assessment, for those who are interested.)

A second disadvantage, which could at least partly derive from the first, is that standardized tests may do a very poor job of capturing and reflecting the learning that goes on in adult basic education classes. In a recent posting to the NLA (National Literacy Advocacy) electronic list, Thomas Sticht discusses a new study by Janet K. Sheehan-Holt and M. Cecil Smith, which finds little improvement in scores on the NALS (National Adult Literacy Survey) test by adults participating in ABE classes. It may thus prove to be a major risk for adult basic education programs across the country and for the system as a whole to be judged largely on the basis of students' improvement in scores on tests that may be inherently incapable of capturing much of the learning that is taking place for these students at these programs.

The third disadvantage is that, despite the literally hundreds of tests that have been produced in this country, very few of these are developed specifically for use with adult learners, and there may be certain portions of our adult learner population for whom no test is appropriate. For example, ESOL teachers have indicated that the BEST test, which is used almost universally for determining SPL levels with non-native-English speakers, was originally developed for use with certain refugee populations and is not necessarily appropriate for some other ESOL populations, especially students at higher levels.

A fourth disadvantage is that all assessments must be rendered in terms of either SPLs (for ESOL) or GLEs (for ABE). I can't really speak to how well the SPL ladder works to reflect students' English language achievement. However, the use of GLEs to report ABE progress is certainly problematic, though it may be mechanically easy enough to do. Quoting briefly from a few sources:

- "Problems with grade level completion criteria for literacy statistics are well documented (e.g. Coles, 1976)." (Hannah Arlene Fingeret, Adult Literacy Education: Current and Future Directions, ERIC, 1984, p.8).

- "Although the problems with grade levels as indicators of adult performance and progress are well-established, their use in the field of adult literacy is surprisingly pervasive." (Susan Lytle, Thomas Marmor, and Faith Penner, paper presented in 1986).

- "Critics of the use of grade levels, however, point out that there is no valid translation indicating what real world literacy skills correspond to completion of a certain number of years in school." (Carolyn Chase Ehringhaus, in the Adult Education Quarterly, 1990, Vol. 40, No. 4, p. 189).

- "Test results that give grade level scores or indicate that learners can identify specific skills on paper-and-pencil tasks yield very limited information. Despite the fact that our society in general seems quite impressed with measurable results that can be report-

ed numerically, such data fail to match the overall goals. The assumption that numerical scores give evidence of confidence and competence is highly questionable." (Rena Soifer, et al, The Complete Theory to Practice Handbook of Adult Literacy, Teachers College Press, 1990, p. 171)

So, while using standardized tests as the sole means of assessment may be relatively easy, there are numerous other difficulties and risks associated with that route. A second possible assessment option for programs is to use various means of alternative assessment and to translate the results of these assessments into GLEs and SPLs. The major advantage to this approach is a very important one: it would provide assessment information that creates a much fuller picture of a student's literacy abilities that is likely to be more meaningful and much more useful to teachers and students alike.

There are again, however, several likely disadvantages as well. The first is the time and energy it would take to create or adapt these methods of alternative assessment for use at a particular program with a particular population of students. It should be noted, though, that a great deal of work has already been done in this area (see, for example, the various *Adventures in Assessment* volumes) and more could be supported by targetted funding from the state Department of Education. Secondly, there will be the difficulty of proving to a sufficient degree the validity and reliability of these measures, though obviously the criteria set for achieving this level of proof will in large part determine how difficult this task will be for individual programs. Again, this difficulty could be mitigated through collaboration on the part of various programs and the support of DOE funding.

A third disadvantage is found in the requirement that these alternative assessments must be translated into SPLs or GLEs. Alternative assessment is not merely another way of getting to the same place; it is also to some degree a different destination. Alternative assessment is based on a view of literacy and learning that doesn't see learning to read and write and do math as activities that can be laid out in a neat, sequential series of skills through which all learners progress from bottom to top. Alternative assessment approaches attempt to create a picture of a learning process that is by its very nature non-linear and that can vary tremendously from person to person. Having to translate, at least on the ABE side, alternative measures of assessment into GLEs certainly acts to negate the original intent and meaning and value of the alternative assessment process.

A third option which programs have is to combine elements of the first two (including their advantages and disadvantages) by using both standardized tests and alternative assessments. This hybrid option would use standardized test results to meet the requirements of the new reporting system in a relatively easy way, while using an alternative assessment approach to provide meaningful and useful information to teachers and students. This option would still require programs' time and effort to develop alternative assessments and would still run the risk of not capturing for reporting purposes the actual learning that is going on in classes. Nevertheless, this option may be the best of those available.

In the long run, we as a field will need to "assess" how well the new approaches

to assessment and accountability—the NRS and SMARTT systems—are capturing and reflecting the learning that students achieve as they attend our classes.

Steve Reuys is Staff Development Coordinator at the A.L.R.I./SABES Greater Boston Regional Support Center.

Layers, Brushes, and Multi-Lane Highways: Examining Accountability in a Non-Traditional Program

BY MARIE CORA

Our work at the Swearer Center is pretty messy stuff. We develop non-traditional models of education that meet needs not met by traditional systems already in place. Much of this work involves tailoring programming to individuals. Having worked in education for 16 years, the biggest lesson I have learned is that there is nothing as individualistic as a person's education. Swearer Center programs strive to help people identify what works for them in the learning process, and then to help them acquire the resources necessary for supporting their efforts. For this methodology to be successful, it means that the many players involved must collaborate carefully and consistently. We must be able to count on each other.

The Programs

The language and literacy programs that I supervise are focused on helping people gain basic skills they need, for example, to find a job or a better living wage, help their children with schoolwork, or conquer ESL at the high school level. Presently, there are seven programs that follow this focus on three ABE programs (Adult Basic Education) and four ESOL programs (English to/for Speakers of Other Languages). Each program is supervised by a part-time, paid program coordinator and staffed by volunteer tutors. All coordinators and volunteers are college students, the majority of whom are studying at Brown University. The language and literacy programs receive funding from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) in addition to being supported by the Swearer Center. All the services we provide to the community are free of charge. This web of individuals presents significant resources brought to bear on the literacy needs of Providence communities, with student leaders at the helm.

Molly, a sophomore concentrating in History and Latin American Studies, coordinates Partners in Education (PIE), an adult basic education program which works exclusively with teenage mothers. PIE pairs female Brown students with female community members who have children and have left high school before graduating. PIE provides individualized educational programming at learners' homes, making schooling accessible. Presently, PIE maintains twelve learning partnerships that meet for approximately three hours per week.

Allison, a senior concentrating in English, coordinates the Pawtucket ESOL Program, which offers small group instruction four nights per week to immigrant community members from an area just north of Providence. Three levels of instruction are offered: ESOL Literacy, for individuals with no literacy skills in any language, and Beginning and Intermediate ESOL. Volunteers team-teach classes until they are comfortable enough to lead a class on their own. Presently, the

This article was written in spring of 2000 as I prepared to leave my directorship of Swearer Center for Public Service programs after nine years. The Swearer Center for Public Service is a non-academic department of Brown University whose mission is to engage undergraduate students and community members in examining issues of social justice, and to develop collaborative programming responsive to the needs of the greater Providence community.

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Pawtucket program engages 12 volunteers and 40 adult learners.

The Layers

Neither the program coordinators nor the volunteers necessarily have a background in literacy or teaching. It is my responsibility to provide leadership and support for them so that they in turn can effectively provide educational opportunities for community members. The programs' structure and methodology stem directly from the learners' needs and strengths. The college students, while new to the craft of teaching, also offer their optimism, energy and creativity to the community, making learner-centered, progressive classrooms a possibility.

In my role as the supervisor of these programs, I am responsible to our learners and the new skills and knowledge they seek; to program coordinators and volunteers and the guidance and training they need; to funders who seek concrete results; and to my colleagues who trust my leadership and rely on my expertise. Each of these roles requires different behavior, involves different expectations of me, and is driven by different assumptions of the roles I play. As with many other areas of work, responsibility and accountability come in layers. And because we are an educational institution, the learning comes in layers as well. As I said, this is messy work.

Brushes with Accountability

As I enter my ninth year in this job, I realize that my expectations and assumptions have changed drastically since 1992. I entered this job fiercely believing (and still believe) that effective teachers must necessarily have formal, rigorous training, and without it, they cannot possibly be held accountable for their work. How can someone who has never digested theory and tested their practice be an effective educator? I entered this job somewhat skeptical that youthful volunteers could carry out work that I had spent six years attempting professionally. This was my first brush with accountability at the Swearer Center: I took the job, so it was my responsibility to figure out how to educate and support a novice group in this vital endeavor.

I lost a little bit of weight and a lot of sleep those first years. I thought my role was to coordinate and support teachers in their effort to bring literacy services to members of the community. But my role is actually to develop those teachers while they struggle to help other people learn. I thought I would be working with teachers of a certain caliber, but I work with student-teachers who are striving to build their teaching skills. While I had to change my assumptions about who I would be working with, I also learned that I was now among a real community of learners. In our programs both the "students" and the "teachers" were clearly learning new skills.

My second brush with accountability involved one of our funders, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). As the director of these literacy programs, I am responsible for making sure that RIDE receives documentation which indicates that we are indeed conducting our literacy business as outlined in the grant guidelines. Often in adult education this is our first responsibility; after all, without funding, we won't exist.

I have slowly shifted my perspective about accountability to the funder. The grants that I write are practical, carefully

crafted, and feasible. Over the years my student staff and I have done our best to fit into what the grant states. But I have come to believe that the funder is the least important player in this game, even though we depend on that money. Regardless of new guidelines or requirements or federal programs, I must remain accountable first to the adult learners who attend our programs.

Expectation and Assumption

In the cascading structure of our programming the question of who is accountable to whom and for what is significant; embedded within are each person's expectations and assumptions. In thinking about what the adult learner needs from us, I find myself working backwards: if the learners needs x, then the volunteers need y, which means the program coordinators need z. I can only make myself accountable to the learner through the work I do with the program coordinator. It is crucial then, that I fully understand what each constituent needs and how he or she defines expectations of one's self and of those with whom he or she is working. Those expectations must be the same. The content and the process might look different depending on the individual and their role, but each person must be challenged, must be presented with relevant material, and must be given opportunities commensurate with his or her capabilities.

In a staff meeting with my program coordinators we were discussing uses of creativity in language teaching. It emerged that many volunteers had been using games such as "Simon Says" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" in their classes in units on the body. This is a viable technique, but one that must be used with other methods to connect new vocabulary with experiences that are a part of learners' lives. In other words, this vocabulary must be put into a context that is relevant to the learner. Otherwise, "heads, knees, and toes" are words in a song that is remembered for only a short time.

In further discussion, it emerged that many volunteers were having difficulty providing real and practical context when teaching new vocabulary. I asked, "What methods and activities do YOU find to be most helpful when learning new vocabulary in another language?" and the response took me by surprise. None of my program coordinators felt that using game techniques would be effective for their own language learning. Why, then, I asked, should they assume that adult learners would find this method helpful or appropriate? Shouldn't the adult learner studying the names of body parts be equally as engaged as the Brown student studying microbiology? Shouldn't the adult learner be presented with material relevant to her life ("How will you describe to your doctor the kinds of pains that you feel in your chest?") just as the Brown student should be presented with the practice of microbiology in the 21st, not the 17th century?

Accountability is a Multi-Lane Highway

What does it mean to count on someone? What does it mean to be counted on? With the layers of staff we have at the Swearer Center, accountability becomes not a two-way street, but a multi-lane highway. The adult learner is counting on her volunteer tutors to teach her what she wants to know; the tutors are counting on their program coordinator to help them figure out how best to help people learn; the coordi-

It is crucial then, that I fully understand what each constituent needs and how he or she defines expectations of one's self and of those with whom he or she is working.

To be effective, we need to identify and articulate our expectations of one another, utilize our assumptions in productive ways, and develop methods for accountability for all participants.

nators are counting on me to help them be effective administrators and teachers for their volunteers.

These layers of trust demand that we continuously examine our assumptions and expectations. To be effective, we need to identify and articulate our expectations of one another, utilize our assumptions in productive ways, and develop methods for accountability for all participants. If we do this, then we are ahead of those grant guidelines: the grant can then reflect the work, not vice versa. With a structure of accountability and trust in place, we create room for creativity and growth for all of us. We take advantage of the messiness to explore new and effective ways to learn and teach together.

Marie Cora is now a Staff Development Specialist for SABES/World Education, and the editor of Adventures in Assessment.

The Adventure Continues...

BY JANET KELLY

It has been about ten years since I first wrote a piece for *Adventures in Assessment*. Everything has changed and nothing has changed at Read/Write/Now over the past decade.

The reasons for improving the tools and practices of assessment of learning and teaching are still the same. Meaningful, effective assessment helps learners on the sometimes long and winding road of adult basic education know they are getting somewhere. It also gives learners and teachers important information about the next steps to take to reach their goals, great and small. If any of us are to be "lifelong learners," it's essential that we not only keep learning new things, but know why we are learning them and what to do with new knowledge and skills. The more involved we are in directing and assessing our own learning, the more likely we are to be able to take what we learn in one setting, and use it and build on it in another.

If this applies to adults who have had a reasonable chance at education and have adequate literacy skills, it applies even more so to adults who have not yet had success in education or an opportunity to get one. If I had started graduate school with the same unanswered questions that many learners have as they start in adult basic education programs, (*When will I be done? What does it mean to be done? What will I be able to do at the end of it that I can't do now?*), I probably would never have started. It is the responsibility of programs like ours to work with learners to answer those questions in relation to each individual learner as well as to the program as a whole.

Assessment that works is also important for teachers as they work to connect learners' goals, needs, and interests with curriculum and learning activities. In a perfect world, goal setting, curriculum, and assessment are all linked together. In this world, we keep working to make those pieces connect.

Ten years ago, the assessment tools we developed were mostly used by teachers to document learners' progress and share with learners on a regular basis. The student portfolios then were more like teacher-directed collections of learners' work.

Learners' portfolios are now their own. There is class time scheduled to introduce them, to put them together in loose-leaf binders that are kept on shelves in each meeting space for classes, and to choose things to include in portfolios. Learners write something about why they chose the item and what it means to them in terms of progress toward a goal.

We still do lots of goal setting in a variety of ways with a variety of tools, including a revised version of the Reading/Writing Goals List we used ten years ago. Learners' goals and interests help form the curriculum in each group. Learners choose a limited number of goals to focus on each session and teachers have goal setting and goal review confer-

In a perfect world, goal setting, curriculum, and assessment are all linked together. In this world, we keep working to make those pieces connect.

ences three times per program year with each of their reading & writing and math students. Learners keep track of what they are doing and learning with writing records, book lists, and math activity records.

Many learners reflect on their reading in Reading Response Journals and all use Dialogue Journals. Published writing, a book review, a resume, a research project, a copy of a driverís license earned, and math work might all find their way into a portfolio. Three times each program year, we reassess reading progress with a combination of an adapted version of the New Readers Press *Whole Language for Adults* Reading Inventory. We have added readings using the Fleisch readability scale to get grade levels and we have added recall, interpretive, and active questions with a scoring scale to make the assessment less subjective. This is not the only way reading is assessed, but it is the way that is used for marking progress within classes and moving people to other classes within the program.

Reading Miscue Analysis is a powerful tool of assessment we are still trying to incorporate into program practice. Some of us who have been working at Read/Write/Now for five or more years have made multiple stabs at doing Miscue Analysis with learners. Over the past year, we have had several in-service training sessions with a consultant from UMASS, Dr. Patricia Silver, and teachers are doing Miscue Analysis with some of their developing and intermediate students. It is very useful in analyzing the strengths and needs of readers and planning instruction, but it takes time and practice on the teacher's part, as well as individual time with a learner to tape oral reading, and then to meet with them after the analysis is done to share it. We are committed to making it part of our assessment practice, but it is far from institutionalized yet.

One of the things about the world of adult basic education that has changed in the past ten years is the degree of accountability required by most funding sources. Funders want to know much more about many more things now. Unfortunately, they all have their own special way for you to demonstrate that your program is doing what they are giving you money to do. If a program has multiple funders, as we do, there may be requirements that mean collecting anecdotes, writing long narratives, doing case studies, collecting detailed data on every learner while they are in the program and finding out about their lives after they leave, using pre-tests, post-tests, reporting on goals set and met, reading levels attained, and attendance. It seems reasonable that when money, public or private, is invested in a program to accomplish certain things, the program must be accountable for accomplishing those things. It does not seem reasonable that being held accountable often means devoting more hours to fulfilling the funders' ideas of accountability than to doing useful assessment with learners, who are the people that all the funding is supposed to be serving. In that perfect world, the tools that work for a program would be acceptable to its funding sources too.

Regardless of the world of grants and reporting requirements, the essential purpose of assessment is informing learners and teachers of where they are on the road to wherever the learner wants to go, and helping them to decide on the next steps or new directions to take. The challenge has grown from finding effective tools and processes for meaningful assessment to

doing it while meeting the requirements of funders without duplicating efforts or creating dual systems of assessment.

So far, we have not found a satisfactory way to avoid the duplication of efforts and duality. One set of goals lists and assessment measurements is the "real" one in terms of what learners and teachers use to understand progress and the other is the "real" one in terms of what must be reported to funders. Neither one seems to fully capture the growth and progress we see happening in the lives of adult learners. The process of continually reviewing and revising tools and procedures for assessment has never stopped, but the sheer volume of new requirements, mandates, technological changes, and information of every kind that has characterized our culture over the past decade has created its own kind of inertia. Add to the mix that funding for literacy is still insecure and insufficient, making continuity in staffing impossible.

It's too easy to fall into a kind of passive/reactive role regarding assessment and accountability to funders. I agree with much of what Heide Spruck Wrigley wrote in her 1998 article, "Assessment and Accountability: A Modest Proposal". If we don't try to develop meaningful frameworks for teaching and assessment that truly reflect our practice and the kinds of successes learners achieve in our programs, Those Who Must Be Reported To will fill the void. This has already happened in many ways, but there is always hope and the politics of education — just like all politics — are subject to change initiated by human beings on many levels. At best, we can hope to influence the policy-makers with the stunning validity of our assessment instruments and what they demonstrate, and at worst we can fail to influence Those Who Must Be Reported To, but still develop more clarity and purpose within our programs and offer learners and teachers a more understandable path defined by real markers of progress that reflect skills learned and used and goals met. In Massachusetts, it seems the door is still open on this process. Maybe it truly is open and maybe it just seems open, but being guardedly optimistic, I say we may as well assume that we still have a voice and use it.

At Read/Write/Now, we've been working, sporadically, on our own teaching & assessment frameworks for reading & writing for almost a year. We consulted with Jane MacKillop, editor of *Whole Language for Adults*, a set of resources published by New Readers Press that we have found useful. We started with the intention of correlating our framework with the six levels described by the National Reporting System, but decided along the way that we needed to have something that made sense to us; we would worry later about translating it into NRS for reporting purposes.

We did look at the NRS levels and try to make connections with it. We also tried to link our framework with the Massachusetts ABE English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, which was not hard to do. Jane MacKillop led us through a process of looking at learners' writings, describing what we saw evidence of, and deciding through this process what qualities are common to beginning, developing, intermediate and GED writers in our program. She facilitated a similar process with reading, through which we named some entry and exit texts as well as the qualities of texts at various levels and what readers do at different stages of reading development. The next stage involves each teacher

The challenge has grown from finding effective tools and processes for meaningful assessment to doing it while meeting the requirements of funders without duplicating efforts or creating dual systems of assessment.

taking the list of descriptors of writers and readers at the levels of their classes and turning them into a checklist to try with learners to get their take on them and see how relevant they are in practice.

We are using the following questions to guide us in developing our framework for teaching and assessment. *What does the typical reader/ writer do at each level? What knowledge or skills does each person bring to writing or reading? What skills are they developing? What skills or strategies need to be mastered before a person is ready to move on to the next level? What literacy experiences do they need in order to progress? What skills and strategies are being modeled or taught?*

We are still revising and refining the program's reading & writing framework. Instead of whole books as exit texts, we are developing a selection of shorter readings that learners and teachers can choose from. The reading and writing checklist items will be given numerical values so that attaining an agreed upon number of skills in each level along with successfully reading and understanding the exit texts will signal a move to the next level group. Progress within the beginning, developing, and intermediate levels will also be marked in this way. Whether we call it a rubric, a framework, or a series of checklists, this tool should make sense to us as learners and teachers, and will be used to make transitions between classes within our program smoother for learners and teachers. It will need to be reviewed and revised on a regular basis to stay current and useful. At least theoretically, it could be correlated to the NRS and used as a tool for external reporting.

During the past five years, we have engaged in a variety of projects that have increased the participation by learners in every aspect of Read/Write/Now. Learners have been on the Health Team, doing research and social action theater, mentored other learners, become Peer Tutors, served on program planning committees, been elected to serve on the program's Advisory Committee, acted as editors of the monthly student newsletter, been members of the Parent Educator Project team, and conducted various action research projects.

These projects have made our claim of being a "learner-centered" program more legitimate than it used to be, and they have strengthened the program with new energy and ideas. We still have a lot to do to make our assessment process really work well for learners and teachers, but we are on what feels like the right road.

It remains to be seen if what we develop will also be meaningful to funding agencies. If so, we'll rejoice and have more time to do interesting things that improve the program. If not, we'll continue to do what we must to fulfill our own needs for assessment and the program's funders' needs for accountability. Everything changes and nothing changes.

Janet Kelly has been a teacher and the Project Manager at Read/Write/Now since 1987.

Authentic Goal Setting with ABE Learners: Accountability for Programs or Process for Learning

BY SALLY GABB

Adults who enroll in adult basic education classes know why they have come back to school. Each states her/his purpose clearly: . . . "to learn English, to get a GED, to make a better life for me and my family." These purposes have propelled adult learners, despite the stresses of family, community and work, to dedicate time to gaining needed basic skills. But for most, this clarity of purpose does not easily translate into crafted 'goals,' outlined as a metered time line with identified benchmarks, and 'documentation' of achievement towards a stated goal or goals.

During its ten-year history, *Adventures in Assessment* has provided a rich record of creative and dynamic efforts by Massachusetts ABE practitioners to devise classroom and program support systems for learner goal-setting support that will enable learners to redefine their purposes, and to understand why and how to set goals. In 1994, Dulaney Alexander wrote:

"Language learning is a lengthy process for most of us. None of our students will master English before leaving our program. Some students will leave to work, some because they must move too far from school, some because their families can't afford their time for school, and some because they decided the "perfect" English is not a realistic short term goal. The skills that enable the student to treat learning English as a personal project, whether in school or out, begin with assessment and goal setting. These are probably as valuable as anything else we teach."

Alexander's eloquent description of the importance of classroom self-assessment and goal setting could be applied to any ABE, GED or ESOL classroom, to complement and build on the purposes which learners can easily identify. His description embraces what many consider truly learner-centered goal setting, with timelines and outcomes that are as mutable as life experience. A test or a time limit will not easily capture the value of such a process for the learner.

Goals and Outcomes: What Are we Counting?

In recent years, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has integrated learner goal setting and outcome assessment as part of the data requirements for the performance accountability system. The system requires funded programs to elicit primary and secondary goals for each learner, with performance to be measured during the one-year grant period for 'primary' goals. In part, this element in the Massachusetts performance reporting system was in response to the National Reporting System, which designates and defines 'core outcomes'. While 'educational gain' is the 'Core Outcome Measure' #1, others include: 2) entering employment, 3) retaining employment, 4) acquiring a secondary diploma and 5)

". . . . for most (adult learners), this clarity of purpose (for attending ABE programs) does not easily translate into crafted goals. . . "

entering post secondary education or training. The NRS requires learner goal setting as a *measure of program performance* as stated in the official NRS Implementation Guidelines. "The NRS will assess program performance by comparing students' outcomes to their stated goals."

According to seasoned practitioners in the Massachusetts system, goal setting is fully supported by the field *in concept*. Practitioners across the state have encouraged recognition of learner-generated goals, and outcome measures other than pre-post test statistics for purely academic gain. But the purposes for goal setting as envisioned by practitioners, and the process through which learners should be supported in setting goals, differs radically from the procedures outlined in the *NRS Measures and Methods*. The NRS has as its stated goal 'to establish an accountability system for the federally-funded adult basic education programs.'

SABES has been given the responsibility for supporting program efforts to meet dual goals: 1) to encourage classroom-based learner-centered formative goal setting and goal attainment evaluation with learners, and 2) to usher in collection of goal setting and goal attainment data through the SMARTT system. A group of practitioners in the Southeast region of Massachusetts recently responded to questions about the challenges in encouraging learners to set goals during the intake process for their participation in the ABE, ESOL, or GED class:

"No matter how limited their reading skills are, or how limited their English is, the first response is always "to learn English", or "to get my GED". Learning how to set goals is part of instruction."

"You have to get to know a learner, gain trust, establish dialogue before that learner will be able to articulate what he or she hopes to accomplish, what the 'goal' is. In the beginning, most learners don't even understand the question if you ask, 'what are your goals in the class for this year".

According to Elsa Auerbach and others, assessment of Adult Basic Education student outcomes is 'authentic' only when based on learner identified purposes for attending ABE classes. 'Authentic assessment' describes goal setting and self evaluation as a process, to be carried out over time in dialogue with the practitioner, measuring skills and content knowledge in the context of real life tasks.

In the still-evolving SMARTT data collection system, the Adult and Community Learning Services division of DOE has created a lengthy list for programs to use as a pre-post measure, with a range of possible 'goals', but the requirement that goal attainment be measured and verified. The list was drawn from both the NRS designations and a survey of the field, from work with programs and their experience with learner-centered goal setting (see *Adventures in Assessment*, Volume 4, April 1993). But programs and practitioners suggest that the very nature of such a pre-post system seems to contradict reflective ongoing self-assessment. The procedures defined by Massachusetts DOE are directly counter to a process that enables the learner to develop goals and learning objectives over time, and to change those goals and objectives as he/she grows as a learner.

Classroom Self Evaluation and SMARTT System Goal Setting: A Not So Complementary Relationship

While the user's manual for the SMARTT system also encourages programs to be truly 'learner centered' and 'open ended' in the goal setting process, most report difficulty in carrying out the activity as suggested in the manual. For some classes, particularly lower level monolingual (English only) ESOL classes, such activities are limited severely by lack of vocabulary and ability to express ideas in English. Even in ABE classes, most students are hard pressed in the initial interview to say more than 'to read better', or 'to get my GED in the long run'. The first is measurable by reading tests, but such tests may not reflect the kind of advances lower level learners make in the beginning.

The outcomes of these behavior changes may only be evident several years after the initial changes. In addition, the learner's primary goal for attending classes may be difficult for ABE programs and practitioners to measure, such as 'improving my communication on the job', 'being able to help my children more with homework', or even 'feeling better about myself as a human being because I'm coming back to school.'

An Ambitious Example: Evolution and Devolution at One Program

In 1993, Amesbury Even Start described a unique and complex goal setting and evaluation process for its Even Start family literacy program (see *Adventures in Assessment*, Volume 4, April 1993). This system included in depth interviewing of each learner, and regular self-assessment on the part of the parent learners. The content was often directed to a combination of self-esteem issues, practical applications of literacy, and application to parent/child interaction.

The Goal Sheet uncovers a variety of assessment information, but at the same time acts as an extremely inviting, unintimidating way to assess initial capabilities, attributes and interests. The Goal Sheet is a visual representation of an eight-week cycle. It is broken up into categories representing program requirements at Even Start, including adult education, parenting skills, child development and parent child together time. These categories are then subdivided into short term and long term goals.

The goal setting process at Amesbury Even Start, according to Susan Martin, Sandra Hall and Jeanette Bahre, provided initial information to case managers, teachers and learners "without the use of extensive formalized testing or frequently inaccurate initial self evaluations."

The ongoing interaction around strengths, challenges and goals enabled the case manager, instructor and learner to work towards understanding how eight-week program options could lead to long term goals. The Amesbury authors stressed that effective goal setting could only occur when a process was in place that allowed learner and staff to revisit such affective areas as dreams and wishes, and do an analysis of "felt" and "real" strengths and challenges. A key aspect of the process was the way that standardized testing (the CASAS) was integrated with the extensive interview process as a way to enable the learner to choose program components, e.g., her short-term goals.

As noted by the authors . . . *"the system is used in self assessment as an adult learner builds [short and long term goals]*

based on the information he/she reflects upon, and as the work is continuously defined and redefined for the future."

In a phone interview, this writer learned that the Amesbury program no longer has a family literacy grant, and the well-developed model is no longer in use at the center. Nevertheless, the model stands as an impressive attempt not only to develop a systematic process for enabling learners to develop appropriate and attainable goals over time, but also to *learn some strategies* for setting appropriate goals.

In-Class Assessment as a Mediated Teacher/Learner Dialogue: A Practitioner Targets Barriers to Persistence

In 1994, Loretta Pardi and Estelle Williams of the Harborside Community Center worked together to develop effective in-class self-assessment/teacher assessment tools. Loretta designed the 'Record of Participation' that both she and each learner completed on a weekly basis. This instrument (see *Adventures in Assessment*, Volume 7, December 1994) allowed the learner to rate him/herself on a wide variety of areas, including attendance, willingness to try new work, independent and group work, class participation, and accomplishment of job skills. In addition, it provided space for the learner to identify specific academic skills mastered in math, writing and social studies.

"In the first weeks of using the record with my class, I found that most of the students tended to give themselves lower ratings than I gave them. This not entirely unexpected result gave rise to a useful class discussion about low self-esteem. As weeks progressed, however, and the class became accustomed to the weekly routine of reflection and assessment, I found that we usually concurred."

Loretta reported that she set up conferences with students when noticeable discrepancies occurred between a student's self assessment and her own. This surfaced issues besides actual performance, including fear and attachment to the class.

In a recent follow-up phone interview with the Harborside Community Center, Loretta confirmed that she still incorporates an ongoing goal setting process into her practice. Loretta explained that she currently focuses on enabling learners to establish their own 'comfort zones' as the most important component of goal setting.

"I work with many learners who are getting ready to transition from ESOL to the pre-GED program. I spend a lot of time talking about what they might expect from the new program. I ask them to consider issues such as work schedule and childcare, which could interfere with their ability to learn. I ask them to consider their learning styles and strategies, and to consider what is realistic for them.

For example, when students tell me they have a hard time remembering what they learned from one session to the next, I ask them to look at how to set short term achievable goals. I stress that setting new goals is a successful accomplishment when the original goal isn't accomplished. I help students learn how to break goals into manageable pieces."

Loretta noted that the whole idea of enabling the learner to find his/her 'comfort zone', and working to achieve goals outside the class that will set the stage for

participating in class and reaching academic goals are not, and probably can not, be a part of the SMARTT data. She reported that in her program, as in many others, the initial goal setting for reporting in the SMARTT data is carried out by the counselor, and that she does her own goal setting work in class. This separation between SMARTT system goal setting and classroom goal setting seems to be a common occurrence. But, as Loretta described, without the developmental process for goal setting, the recorded goals will not reflect a valid student purpose, or a true picture of learner goals attained.

Goal Setting: In Conflict with Language and Culture?

Katy Hartnett, ESOL specialist for the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston, says goal setting as a pre-post summative system is a limiting picture of the ESOL student audience and the many goals they have for seeking education. She explained:

"This is especially true for ESOL learners, who can't express in English either short or long-term goals. Most ESOL programs settle for 'improve English' because it's the only goal most new learners can express, and it fits the SMARTT guidelines. And while it IS the primary goal for most ESOL learners, it doesn't capture the other attending goals. The cultural journey for ESOL learners is complex and multi-dimensional."

In his 1998 action research project, practitioner Glenn Cotton described several 'authentic' ways to identify learner 'purposes' for improving English. The teacher may show the learner with very limited English a group of photographs or drawings depicting people in a variety of social situations. Learners are asked to choose those that are most important to them for learning English. Or learners may be asked to draw their own pictures of situations in which they feel it is most important to be able to use English.

Glenn noted: . . . *"For a goal setting activity to be truly useful, especially with beginning level ESOL learners, it seems to me that it needs to be integrated into a learning activity which assists learners to understand the questions being asked of them, and which guides them to reflect on and discover what their authentic needs/goals are."*

Both Katy and Glenn observed that always recording the 'improve English' goal doesn't provide valuable feedback for either the learner or the program.

Rethinking Goal Setting and Outcome Assessment: What Progress since 1996?

In the introduction to Volume 9 of *Adventures in Assessment*, Alison Simmons wrote:

"Teachers know how to measure progress, but get stuck trying to find a tool or reporting mechanism to put their data in that would satisfy all the different audiences. The question goes beyond, 'how will I measure the progress of my students so it is meaningful to them, informs instruction and the curriculum and satisfied the funder'.

"Rather the questions should be 'how do I report the progress I have seen to satisfy different audiences? How do I report the progress my students have seen [in themselves]? What information is useful to me

"Many feel that these in-class and/or program-based formative processes are in conflict with the state mandate for summative goal assessment."

in my program, and what information do I need to satisfy other audiences?"

Alison referred to the many forms of alternative assessment she had seen developed over the years by Massachusetts practitioners, including checklists, portfolios, and benchmarks, as well as the standardized tools. She also forecast the likely requirement for more systematic and standardized assessment to satisfy both public and private funding sources. For this reason, she concludes:

". . . we need to validate and encourage teachers to continue to develop systems that inform instruction and show students where they are making gains, and how far they have come in achieving their goals."

Through my limited research, I have learned that Massachusetts practitioners *do* continue to develop and utilize creative tools and methods for formative assessment, and classroom processes for identifying, evaluating and revising/expanding learning goals. As noted, many feel that these in-class and/or program-based formative processes are in conflict with the state mandate for summative goal assessment.

The Position at the Top: Process Can Complement Outcome Data Collection

In a recent exchange on the National Literacy Advocacy listserv, Massachusetts Director of Adult Basic Education Robert Bickerton wrote the following:

"For several years in Massachusetts, we have made the recording of student articulated goals for their participation in ABE the centerpiece of what we mean by 'performance accountability' - predating the Workforce Investment Act [and the NRS]. The policy is to record whatever the student says is the reason or reasons why she/he has decided to enroll in the program and to update these goals as the students' skills, abilities, dreams, aspirations and perspectives evolve and, possibly, solidify.

"Not only have programs been under NO pressure from the state to curtail how ambitious and multiyear many of these goals are, but our office has often been in the position of encouraging and counseling programs to not curtail what students articulate at their end. High expectations are embraced by everyone - in theory. But are hard for some to accept in practice. With WIA came the expectation that the student's 'primary goal' would be achievable within a single program year.

"I and others in our state strongly objected to this requirement arguing that it would pervert having student-articulated goals . . . and could foster 'creaming.' For a while it appeared as if this would become a sticking point in our negotiations with the USDOE and we were prepared for a battle. Instead we found a way to tweak the existing policy. WE still honor the goals articulated by each student regardless of how long it may take to achieve them. We now also ask programs to discuss with each student what goals (or benchmarks) he or she would like to achieve in the program year."

ACLS Director Bickerton wrote, *"Massachusetts DOE, including its professional development arm, the SABES system, needs to work with the field to develop benchmarks and standards for learning gains and goal achievement that are*

responsive to the needs and circumstances of the very diverse students who come to us for services."

There are rich resources and knowledge of ABE learner purposes and goals within the community of practitioners and learners throughout the ABE system in Massachusetts. Creative practitioners resist the pressure to make 'goal setting' into an exercise isolated from the teaching/learning process. Dynamic practitioners such as those quoted in this article want to demonstrate accountability for their work with learners. The challenge to ABE lies in promoting and sharing the many authentic models and practices for identifying learner purposes and goals in their own terms, and at the same time providing outcome data for learner achievement that will confirm the 'performance accountability' that is alive and well in ABE classrooms across the state.

Sally Gabb is the SABES Regional Coordinator for Southeastern Massachusetts.

Quinsigamond Community College's Site-Specific Assessment

BY CHRIS HEBERT

The new site-specific ESL assessment test that follows was developed in response to our instructors' concerns about the accuracy and scoring of our previous site-specific assessment test. The original test didn't cover the placement or assessment of the SPL 7-10 level students. With the addition of four higher-level ESL classes, instructors and Learning Support Specialists needed to be able to accurately assess and place students who fell into that category.

There was also a need for a test that was more objective and more standardized in its scoring. The older assessment, with its informal scoring, was adequate for assessing and placing students at the SPL 0-2, 3-4, and 5-6 levels, but the instructors began asking for more specific information about their student's oral, reading, writing, and grammar skills. These concerns and issues prompted our ESL instructors to create the new test.

Anne Burke, ESL Instructor, SPL 0-2 (beginner), Linda Gosselin, ESL Instructor, SPL 5-6 (intermediate), and Arpi Hedeshian, ESL Instructor, 7-10 (advanced) formed a committee to design a new assessment test. They all agreed that it was time for a new test and the contents of the old test needed to be upgraded. They held several meetings during the summer. They looked over samples of tests being used in the ABE program at QCC and standardized and alternative tests being used by other programs. They used the standardized BEST Test as a guide to create their new test. They wanted to make sure their new test covered all the skill areas. They also surveyed all the ESL instructors and Learning Support Specialists to ask if the current test placed their students accurately and if the scoring gave enough information about their students' oral, reading, writing, and grammar skills. They asked for suggestions to revise the current assessment test.

The new test still assesses the four skill areas (oral, grammar, reading, writing), but the administering and scoring of the test provides more accurate placement and scoring.

The new assessment test was piloted during the summer of 2000 and is still being piloted throughout the 2000-2001 school year. The initial committee will review and revise the test this spring if necessary.

Christina Hebert is the Program Manager for the Quinsigamond Community College's Adult Community Learning Center. Anne Burke has been teaching the beginning ESOL Level at QCC's ACLC for the past ten years. Linda Gosselin has been teaching the intermediate ESOL level at QCC's ACLC for the past fifteen years. Arpi Hedeshian is now a Learning Support Specialist at three of QCC ACLC's sites.

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Quinsigamond Community College Adult Basic Education Program

ESOL INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Directions for Administration and Scoring of the Test of Aural/Oral Skills and Test of Grammar, Reading, and Writing

Applicant's Name _____ Date _____

General Information on Testing and Scoring

Testing:

There are three tests: The Test of Aural/Oral Skills, The Literacy Test, and the Test of Grammar, Reading, and Writing. The Aural/Oral Test should be administered first because the score from this test determines whether an applicant will take the Literacy Test(for low level applicants) or do the Test of Grammar, Reading, and writing (for those who are beginning to advanced level).

Aural/Oral Test –

This test consists of three parts: an oral interview, looking at a picture and answering questions about it, and a dictation. This test is administered to ail ESOL applicants, with testing ending when it is obviously too difficult for the applicant. More detailed instructions are found in the directions for the aural/oral test.

Literacy Test –

This test is given to any applicant who scores less than 10 points on the aural/oral test or is unable to do the aural/oral test at all. This test consists of two parts: dictating letters and numbers to the applicant and having the applicant match words and pictures. More information on the administration of the literacy test is in this direction booklet.

Test of Grammar, Reading, and Writing –

This test is done by all applicants who were able to do all of the aural/oral test or get more than 10 points on the aural/oral test. The test booklet is given to the applicant and the applicant works on his or her own to complete the test. The applicant may not use a dictionary or be assisted by anyone with the test, other than to clarify the directions for each part of the test.

Scoring:

Scoring for the sections of each test is included in the instructions in this booklet. After all testing is finished and each section of the tests the applicant has taken is scored, a cover score sheet should be completed, listing the SPL levels for the Aural/Oral Test, the Literacy Test and/or Grammar, Reading, and Writing. Then the applicant is assigned a placement level. The two tests the applicant has taken should be clipped together with the cover sheet so that staff can see an applicant's SPL levels in various skill areas at a glance.

Aural/Oral Test

To facilitate administering of this test and to ensure that different testers administer the test in the same manner, the directions for Parts A and B are at the beginning of each part. There are directions for administering Part C, the dictation, on the sheet containing the dictation sentences.

Part A: Oral Interview

There are ten questions in the oral interview. Ask each question and score the applicant's response according to the key shown at the beginning of the oral interview. When conducting the oral interview, if an applicant has a lot of trouble comprehending the first four questions, STOP THE INTERVIEW and assume a score of 0 for the rest of the interview questions.

Do Parts B and C with applicants who score 10 or more points in the oral interview. If the applicant scores less than 10 points, don't have the applicant do Parts B and C. The interviewer will then give the literacy test to the applicant. At the end of the interview add the scores for each question and record the total in the space provided at the end of the oral interview part.

Part B: Picture and Questions

Using the picture card of the scene at a train station, show the picture to the applicant and ask the six questions about the picture. Be sure to follow the instructions to the tester that appear in parentheses for each question. Scoring is the same as for Part A. At the end of Part B, add and record the total in the space provided.

Part C: Dictation

The directions for administering the dictation are also provided on the dictation sheet. Select one of the dictation sentences from each level (for a total of three sentences) to dictate to the applicant. If it is obvious that the applicant can't do the dictation, stop after attempting the first sentence. If the applicant attempts the dictation but has great difficulty, don't have him/her try an advanced sentence.

When reading each sentence, pause after each slash mark to give the applicant time to write one phrase before going on to the next phrase. If the applicant asks, a phrase can be repeated one time.

The scoring for the dictation is at the bottom of the dictation page in the test. Circle the total for how the applicant did in doing the dictation.

ESOL Initial Assessment

Part C: Dictation

ADMINISTRATION:

Select one sentence from each level to dictate to the applicant, if it is obvious that the applicant can't do the dictation, stop at the first sentence. If the applicant attempts the dictation, but has great difficulty, don't have him/her try the advanced sentences.

DICTATION SENTENCES:

Beginning Level:

1. I go / to school.
2. Ten cats sit / in the tree.

Intermediate Level:

1. The children ran /into the house.
2. He is taking / his vacation in August.

Advanced Level:

1. My neighbor was stopped / by the police for drunk driving,
2. The leaves change color / and fall from the trees in autumn.

SCORING FOR THE AURAL/ORAL TEST

Add the scores for the three parts of the test and record the score in the Grand Total space at the bottom of the dictation page. The total numbers of points for this test are 100. Record the applicant's oral SPL level in the space provided on the front cover of the Aural/Oral Test. The breakdowns of scores by SPL level are as follows:

90-100 points	=	SPL 10
80-89 points	=	SPL 9
70-79 points	=	SPL 8
60-69 points	=	SPL 7
50-59 points	=	SPL 6
40-49 points	=	SPL 5
30-39 points	=	SPL 4
20-29 points	=	SPL 3
10-19 points	=	SPL 2
1-9 points	=	SPL 1
Couldn't do/understand anything	=	SPL 0

LITERACY TEST

Administration

Give the literacy test to any applicant who cannot do the oral interview or who scores less than 10 points on the oral interview.

Part A: Dictation

Dictate the following random order letters and numbers to the applicant and have him/her write them on the lines provided in the literacy test. See the dictation card for the letters and numbers to be dictated.

Letters:	t	r	e	s	b	i	m	g	y	a	l	d	o	p

Numbers:	7	3	6	1	2	11	18	20	45	99	100

Part B: Reading (Matching Pictures and Words)

Have the applicant do Part B on his/her own. DO NOT READ THE WORDS TO THE APPLICANT. The applicant is to look at each word or sentence and put a circle around the picture that illustrates the word or sentence.

Scoring:

Part A: Dictation
Count the number of letters and numbers the applicant got correct and score as follows:

12 or less correct	=	SPL 0
13-24 correct	=	SPL 1
25 correct(no errors)	=	SPL 2

Part B: Reading(Matching)
Count the number of matchings the applicant got correct and score as follows:

4 or less correct	=	SPL 0
5-9 correct	=	SPL 1
10 correct	=	SPL 2

GRAMMAR, READING, AND WRITING TEST

Administration

If the applicant was able to do all sections of the aural/oral test and did not need to do the literacy test, give the applicant the test booklet for the Grammar, Reading, and Writing Test and have him/her do the test. After the applicant has finished the test, check to be sure he/she has tried to do all sections of the test and didn't skip a page or section by accident.

Scoring

After checking each section, record the scores on the score sheet.

Part A: Grammar 22 Sentences

Count the number of items the applicant got correct and record the score as follows:

0-4 correct	=	SPL1-2
5-9 correct	=	SPL 3-4
10-14 correct	=	SPL 5-6
15-19 correct	=	SPL 7-8
20-22 correct	=	SPL 9-10

Part B: Reading **7 Questions**

Add the number of correct responses.

Record the score as follows:

None correct	=	SPL 0-2
1-2 correct	=	SPL 3-4
3-4 correct	=	SPL 5-6
5-6 correct	=	SPL 7-8
7 correct	=	SPL 9-10

Part C: Writing about a Picture

Look at the applicant's writing and record the score as follows:

No writing	=	SPL 0-2
Writes isolated words & phrases, with many grammar, spelling, and syntax errors	=	SPL 3-4
Writes short, simple sentences with some grammar, spelling, and syntax errors	=	SPL 5-6
Writes more complex sentences with fewer grammar, spelling, and syntax errors	=	SPL 7-8
Writes very well with very few grammar, spelling, or syntax Errors	=	SPL 9-10

ESOL INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Quinsigamond Community College Adult Basic Education Program

TEST OF AURAL/ORAL SKILLS

Applicant's Name _____ Date _____

Oral SPL Level _____ Interviewer _____

Part A: Oral Interview:

Ask each of the following questions and circle the appropriate number below each question that corresponds to the applicant's comprehension of and response to the question, according to the key shown here:

Comprehension

0	1	2	3
No Comprehension	Comprehension after repeated & reworded	Comprehension after repeated once	Full Comprehension

Response:

0	1	2	3
No response or incorrect response	Responded in isolated words or phrases Correct response Little or no control of basic grammar	Correct response Attempts complete response Some control of grammar	Correct response Complete response Good control of grammar

Interview Questions:

1. What is your name?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

2. What is your address?

Comprehension	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

3. What is your telephone number?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

4. What country are you from?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response	0	1	2	3

(If applicant is having a lot of trouble with #1-#4, stop the oral interview and give the literacy test.)

5 What languages do you speak?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

6 How long have you lived in the U.S. ?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

7. Why did you come to the U.S.?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

8. Tell me about your family

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

9 What do you like to do in your free time?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

10. What are your plans for the future?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

Sub-Total:_____

(If the applicant has gotten less than 10 points on the oral interview, do not do Parts B and C. Aural/Oral testing stops at this point. Give the applicant the literacy test.)

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Part B: Picture and Questions

Show the picture to the applicant and ask the following questions about it, using the intructions in parentheses for each question. Use the same scoring system as for Part A.

Questions about the Picture:

1 (Point to the picture) What is this place?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

2 (Do not point to the clock) What time is it?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

3. (Point to Paul and Kim) What are Paul and Kim doing?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

4. (Point to Michael) Why is Michael running?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

5. (Point to Sara and Tom) This is Sara and Tom. Who isn't getting on the train?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

6. (Point to David) a. Where do you think David is going?
b. Why do you think he is going_____ _____?

Comprehension:	0	1	2	3
Response:	0	1	2	3

Sub-Total_____ _____

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WWW
$

Part C: Dictation

(To Interviewer: Follow the directions on the Dictation Aministration sheet and have the applicant write the dictated sentences below.)

1._____

2._____

3._____

Total:	0	Couldn't do any sentences
	1	3+ errors in beginning level sentence
	2	1 error in beginning level sentence; 3+ errors in intermediate sentence
	3	no errors in beginning level sentence; no more than 2 errors in intermediate level sentence; 4+ errors in advanced level sentence
	4	no errors in beginning level sentence; no more than 1 error in intermediate level sentence; no more than 4 errors in advanced level sentence.

Grand Total:_____

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LITERACY DICTATION

Dictate All Letters and Numbers

7 3 6 1 2 11 18 20 45 99 100
t r e s b i m g y a l d o p

Dictation Sentences: **Dictate one sentence from each level. Don't continue if applicant seems to have difficulty.**

Beginning Level:

1. **I go/ to school.**
2. **Ten cats sit / in the tree.**

Intermediate Level:

1. **The children ran / into the house.**
2. **He is taking / his vacation in August.**

Advanced Level:

1. **My neighbor was stopped / by the police for drunk driving.**
2. **The leaves change color / and fall from the trees in autumn.**

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Quinsigamond Community College Adult Basic Education Program

TEST OF GRAMMAR, READING, AND WRITING SKILLS

Applicant's Name _____ Date _____

Part A - Grammar

Directions: Read each sentence. Choose the correct word or phrase (a, b, or c) that belongs in the space. Circle **a**, **b**, or **c** for the answer you choose.

1. The man _____ to work every morning.

   a. drives b. drived c. driving

2. _____ you live in Worcester?

   a. Do b. Are c. Have

3. The students_____ English in class now.

   a. studies b. is study c. are studying

4. _____ Mrs. Torres watching TV?

   a. Does b. Is c. Has

5. I _____ very tired yesterday

   a. am b. was c. do

6. She _____ her friend in New York last Saturday.

   a.visit b. visited c. visiting

7. We _____ home when it started to rain.

   a. were walking b. are walking c. was walking

8. It _____ tomorrow.

a. rain b. rained c. is going to rain

9. They _____ to their country next month.

a. will return b. returning c. returned.

10. Before Mary and her husband _____ to bed they are going to watch the news.

a. go b. goes c. will go

11. If it _____ tomorrow, Jack is going swimming.

a. is rain b. doesn't rain c. rain

12. Matt is very tired, so he _____ go to bed early.

a. ought to b. has to c. can

13. Jim _____ soccer better than baseball.

a. prefers b. would rather play c. likes

14. Maria _____ a new job.

a. has gotten b.works c. find

15. Dick _____ lunch yet.

a. has b. ate c. hasn't eaten

16. I _____ for the bus for the past two hours. As usual, it is late.

a. am waiting b. waited c. have been waiting

17. You _____ on that project for two straight days. It's time for you to take a break.

a. have working b. have been working c. were working

18. _____ you ever been to Hawaii?

a. Did b. Are c. Have

19. The Torres family has been in the United States _____ a long time.

a. for b. since

20. Sonia has lived in Worcester _____ 1989.

a. for b. since

21. Sarah enjoys _____ in the ocean.

a. swimming b. to swim c. swims

22. Our boss agreed _____ us a ten minute break.

a. giving b. to give c. gives

GO TO PAGE 4 → READING

# Correct	SPL 1-2	SPL 3-4	SPL 5-6	SPL 7-8	SPL 9-100
	0 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	14 to 19	20 to 22

GRW: Part B

Reading Comprehension

ANNIE'S STORY

I brought a very excited heart to the United States. I was born in China and I grew up there.

I thought I would be very happy to live in the wonderful city of San Francisco. But I was wrong. I felt very lonely. I cried when I thought about my family and friends back in China. Eventually I decided to go to school to learn English.

On my first day in school, I made a mistake. I was very embarrassed. On the application form, I wrote my name in the Chinese way. I didn't know what last name and first name meant. Then the teacher called everyone's name. Everyone answered, except me. I thought she did not call my name. I asked her, but she said she had already called everybody's name.

Then she checked the list. She saw that I had made a mistake in my name. She taught the class the difference between writing a name in China and in the United States. I was embarrassed, but I enjoyed learning something new. Then I knew that a positive attitude would help me learn to speak and write English very soon.

Still, two years later, every time I write my name on an application form, it reminds me of that first day in class.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Read the questions carefully and circle the correct answer:

1. Where was Annie from?
   a. China
   b. San Francisco
   c. The United States

2. Where does Annie live now?
   a. China
   b. San Francisco
   c. New York

3. Why wasn't Annie happy in the United States?

   a. Because it was a wonderful place
   b. Because she decided to study English
   c. Because she missed her family and friends

4. What mistake did Annie make in writing her name?

   She put her last name first.
   She didn't spell it correctly.
   She wrote it in Chinese.

5. Annie says, "On the first day of school, I made a mistake. I was very **embarrassed**."
   What does the word **"embarrassed"** mean?
   a. Angry
   b. Ashamed
   c. Stupid

6. Annie says, "Then I knew that a **positive attitude** would help me."
   What does **"Positive attitude"** mean?

   a. She needed help with her English.
   b. She didn't feel confident and optimistic about her ability to learn English.
   c. She felt confident and optimistic about her ability to learn English.

7. From reading the story, what do you think Annie will do in the future?

   She will go back to China soon.
   She will stay in San Francisco.
   She will move to New York.

GO TO PAGE 6 ⟶ WRITING

SCORING

# Correct	SPL 1-2	SPL 3-4	SPL 5-6	SPL 7-8	SPL 9-100
	0 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 14	14 to 19	20 to 22

GRW: Part C

WRITING

Please write 4-8 sentences about what people are doing at the beach.

Quinsigamond Community College
Adult Basic Education Program

SCORE SHEET

Name_____ Date_____ _____

Oral Interview/Picture
Beginning/Advanced Dictation spl ____

Literacy Dictation spl ____

Literacy Matching spl ____

Grammar spl ____

Reading spl ____

Writing spl ____

Placement Level _____

What Works Literacy Partnership: Making Data Work for You

BY DIANE ROSENTHAL

Adult basic education programs collect large amounts of data. In many instances programs tend to collect more data than they know what to do with. Most often this data is used for reporting purposes and has limited impact on a program's day-to-day operations. However, as adult educators we recognize that accurate, complete data is essential to remaining a viable and credible organization. We also know that it takes time, financial support, committed personnel and patience to create a data system that informs and is fully integrated into an agency's day-to-day operations.

The What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP), led by Literacy Partners in New York City, was founded in 1996 with a grant from the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. It brought together 12 exemplary adult literacy programs from across the country who were interested in building their capacity to collect, manage and analyze data, before results and accountability became the driving forces behind educational policy in the United States. WWLP represents a discerning and proactive response by national leaders in adult education, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and local programs to launch a state-of-the-art effort to dramatically improve the ability of adult education programs to collect data and report on student achievements. Over the past five years these programs have worked diligently to identify effective practices that lead to using data for program improvement and decision-making. These programs believe in the fundamental power of quality data.

The programs that comprise the Partnership represent the diversity of adult education providers. They are urban, rural and somewhere in between. Budgets range from $250,000 to $4 million. Together the partners engage the services of 1,837 volunteers and employ 270 paid part-time and full-time teachers. The programs include eight that are community-based, two school district-operated, and two community college-based. They are located in Illinois, Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, Arizona, Ohio, Vermont and Montana. The total number of students served by Partnership agencies exceeds 28,000.

For the past five years the WWLP Partners have been on a journey, sometimes frustrating sometimes exhilarating. When Partners joined WWLP they were at various stages in their data collection practices. Some had been collecting data for years as part of centralized urban networks and had sophisticated management information systems in place. Others lacked even rudimentary databases and many had no uniform assessment practices. All were committed, however, to making substantial changes in their programs and to improving their approaches to collecting, using and analyzing data. They were eager to find out how their students were doing by employing more uniform assessment practices; they were willing to administer stan-

If the WWLP Partners began asking better questions about their programs and collected appropriate data, they would uncover new and vital information that could lead to improved instructional and administrative practices.

dardized tests as well as performance-based measures. Furthermore, they were convinced that, if they began asking better questions about their programs and collected appropriate data, they would uncover new and vital information that could lead to improved instructional and administrative practices. The challenges that each program has faced have been uniquely its own. The "lessons learned" as a result of this collaborative effort, however, have begun to create a remarkably consistent picture of just what it takes to make data "work" for an agency.

As WWLP enters its final year, the Partners are writing case studies to document and share their "lessons learned" with the field. One Partner writes,

"Prior to joining WWLP we had been providing educational services to adults seeking to increase their basic academic skills, increase their English language proficiency and find sustainable employment. We were providing these services largely without a system of student assessment, which resulted in inaccurate data, no reliable system to asses the cost of specific outcomes, and few opportunities to reliably promote and advocate for the organization in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness. . . . Today our program has worked quite diligently to create a system of assessment that meets external requirements yet is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of staff and students. From the identification of assessment tools, to training instructors, to revamping the database system entirely, to creating all new forms that capture essential information, we believe we are now better equipped to meet the challenges that adult education faces in the 21st century."

The What Works Literacy Partnership represents a unique model of professional development that merits examination and replication. Partner programs have had opportunities to receive training from expert researchers and educational evaluators; they have been able to experiment with the development of their assessment systems and have had the benefit of sustained interaction with colleagues around shared goals. Another Partner states,

"Our early association with the What Works Literacy Partnership brought the issues of assessment and evaluation to the forefront. By interacting with other agencies throughout the country, we were able to see the benefits that involving teachers and learners in creating a formal assessment process would have. The importance of systematizing and standardizing assessment processes was revealed through our interaction with the partners and from the expert training that we received... We learned from WWLP the importance of asking the right questions and analyzing the correct data to present a rich and detailed picture of our agency, its programs and accomplishments to funders, trustees, staff, and learners."

WWLP has identified key findings for developing assessment and data collections systems, including:

- Understanding the multiple purposes for assessment — including documenting program impact, finding ways to improve programs and monitoring individual student progress — will help in designing an effective system,

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- Involving staff in every stage of assessment and achieving staff buy-in are key ingredients to the success of any evaluation and assessment plan,
- Investing in staff development is essential,
- Administering standardized assessment measures correctly yields valid and reliable data,
- Program managers, students, tutors, funders and policymakers share the responsibility to provide high-quality adult literacy programs and gather the evidence necessary to demonstrate that these programs actually work,
- Students need to be involved in and understand each phase of the assessment process, and
- Asking good questions and gathering good data enable a program to analyze successes and make improvements when necessary and desired.

Out of the WWLP effort will come project materials that can help others design effective and efficient assessment and evaluation plans. The products include:

- **Self-Assessment Survey of Agency Resources and Skills.**
  This instrument is designed to assist programs in identifying current data collection procedures and areas that need improvement.
- **Indicators of Data Proficiency: Three Stages of Growth.**
  This model identifies three levels of program proficiency with corresponding descriptors assigned to each level. Programs can use this document to assess what systems and practices are currently in place that support the collection and use of and to determine what needs to be done to move the organization to the next level.
- **Data Bytes Guide Sheets.**
  This series of information sheets answers the most frequently-asked questions about data collection, management and analysis. Sample sheets respond to questions such as, how do I build a data collection system? How can I train teachers and tutors to collect data? How do I involve students in data collection and assessment?
- **Model Data Reports.**
  Sample reports from WWLP agencies will provide models for effectively using data to tell an organization's story.
- **Case Studies.**
  Each WWLP agency tells the story of how it resolved an issue related to data collection and assessment. They represent the "lessons learned" from the field.

Conclusion

The past five years have been an exciting time of discovery and challenges for the WWLP initiative. Through a process of support, training and experimentation, the partners have developed a broad body of knowledge about what it takes to build data collection systems and develop effective assessment practices. Agencies have been able to identify the skills they need and to focus on honing those skills. They

have learned what they can do with the new knowledge they have gained and are sharing that knowledge with funders, policymakers and adult educators across the country.

The case study that follows describes how one WWLP Partner — Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley — identified a challenge and worked together to find solutions.

For more information on the What Works Literacy Partnership or on its upcoming publications, contact 1-212-802-1113 or go to its newly designed website at *http://www.WWLP.org.*

Diane Rosenthal is the director of What Works Literacy Partnership at Literacy Partners in NYC.

Analyzing Your Organization's Data To Tell Your Story

HEIDI L. FISHER
CAROL L. GABLER

The Challenge:

A program with a tendency to collect too much data needed to develop a clear and concise data plan that would allow meaningful articulation of its successes and challenges.

Who We Are:

Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley (LVA-CV) is a non-profit organization that began providing services in 1986. Our main office is located in Eau Claire, WI, but we serve a tri-county area. Because of the multiple rural areas served, it remains a constant challenge to meet the needs of adults and families while remaining a cohesive organization.

LVA-CV provides services through several programs: one-to-one tutoring, jail instruction, workplace education, citizenship, and comprehensive family literacy. During the 1999-2000 fiscal year, 246 adult students and 96 children were served through LVA-CV programs, with a total of 13,701 instructional hours. Ours is primarily a volunteer-based program, but direct teacher instruction takes place at our family literacy sites located in two counties.

Our Story:

At LVA-CV we knew that everyone was working hard to collect the data necessary to satisfy a long and varied list of partners and funders. At year's end, we found ourselves floundering in long, detailed reports from the ten individual programs spread out over three counties. What was worse, all were using slightly different recording systems to collect data. Each submitted a variety of reports to our executive director. This made it particularly challenging to compile program and organization-wide evaluations, analyze the data, to share with our funders and board of directors. The sheer quantity of data was obscuring the essential information and impeding our progress and ability to share successes and challenges of the students served in our programs.

Our challenge was to pull consistent pieces of information from all segments, record that standardized data accurately in a computerized collection system, consolidate the findings, and produce a report. Our involvement with the What Works Literacy Partnership (WWLP) led to improvements in our approach. By asking the right and same questions of every segment, we were able to determine what information we needed at the beginning, thus avoiding a lot of wasted time and energy.

Recommendations:

Developing an efficient data plan involves a cycle of collecting, analyzing, organizing, revising, and articulating. We recognize that our work has only just begun, but based on what we have learned, we can recommend these steps

when developing a data plan. See also the flow chart at the end of this article.

1. *Examine your organization's strategic plan*
   - Clearly define your program goals through strategic planning. LVA-CV's strategic planning process involves both staff and the board of directors. The strategic plan incorporates a healthy cycle of planning, reviewing, and evaluating at all levels. Each staff member also develops an annual action plan as a focus for his or her individual staff goals.

2. *Determine the questions you need to ask*
   - Include your staff at all stages to ensure staff "buy-in" and thoroughness. The staff is in touch with information that can be easily gathered and has an awareness of what will be required for consistent data collection.
   - General questions guide the early stages, but evolve and become more sophisticated with time. Examples of general questions:

     What do we need to show learner progress?
     What do we need to accurately measure outcomes?
     What do we need to guide program planning?

   - More specific questions help pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in individual programs. Examples of more advanced questions:
     Are family literacy students making progress after 50 hours of instruction?
     Are students in one-to-one tutoring making progress after one year of tutoring instruction?

     By asking what we need to know to become more effective, we are better prepared to determine from our data such factors as the percentage of students who make gains on standardized tests, the percentage of tutors who have completed the competencies for training, and the percentage of students who have achieved one or more personal goals. By including the staff in creation of the questions all data can then be gathered in an efficient way.
   - Changing needs affect question selection. We must schedule time to review and assess what we have learned from collected data at the end of each semester. This analysis helps us ask better questions and then adapt our programming to best meet students' needs.
   - Questions need to support strategic plan. This cycle does not always flow in a step-by-step manner. For example, you may discover that data questions do not support your strategic plan. In this case it would be important to revise questions to ensure that the organizational needs are being addressed.

3. *Develop/revise the data plan*
   - Define roles.
     Determine who is in charge of data (e.g., the data person, the teacher, and/or coordinators). In our program it was decided that educators and technical personnel should share responsibility for data decisions. As a group they determine how they

will collect, process, manage, and analyze data.

- Establish a timeline for the assessment process.
  Determine when testing will need to take place. In our program it was decided that we need at a minimum to pre/post-test annually. The data questions we ask help to determine the timeline.
- Standardize the data collection process.
  We incorporated a computerized data collection system to provide consistent data recording. All teachers receive training and are expected to follow the same collection procedures. We discovered that not all teachers were assessing in the same manner, so we reviewed time guidelines and appropriate assessment procedures.
- Revise forms to reflect the questions. This streamlines data entry. Revised forms have helped us to ensure that we were collecting all information up front and we did not need to go back and "fill in blanks."
- Define terms for consistent usage. We provide time in monthly staff meetings to ensure that terms such as "on hold" and "waiting to be placed," mean the same to all working with data and assessment.
  We also discovered that individuals from our three counties used different definitions for "full-time" employment, which resulted in inconsistent data.
- Review and standardize testing practices.
  When we formalize how tests are given, we can more accurately measure the outcomes. At the start of every year we review our test practices to assure consistency in timing and administration of assessment tests. We make sure students receive the same pre-test as post-test. We revise inefficient strategies, such as our original decision to administer standardized tests after 50 hours of instruction, which proved to be too soon. We now do pre- and post-testing every year with approximately 80% of our students. We have also come to realize that not everyone who comes into our program is going to benefit from the standardized assessment process.
- Strengthen staff communication. Monthly staff meetings designed to deal with issues of data collection provide an opportunity to share information and ask questions. They foster a supportive environment in the team effort to do things right, as do occasional staff lunches geared to staff interaction time. Bringing in experts who can help clarify the crucial questions and assist with technology now can save time and money later.

4. *Aggregate data for reporting*
   - We had to decide what information would be collected, and when. Should reports be made monthly, every six months, yearly, or a combination?

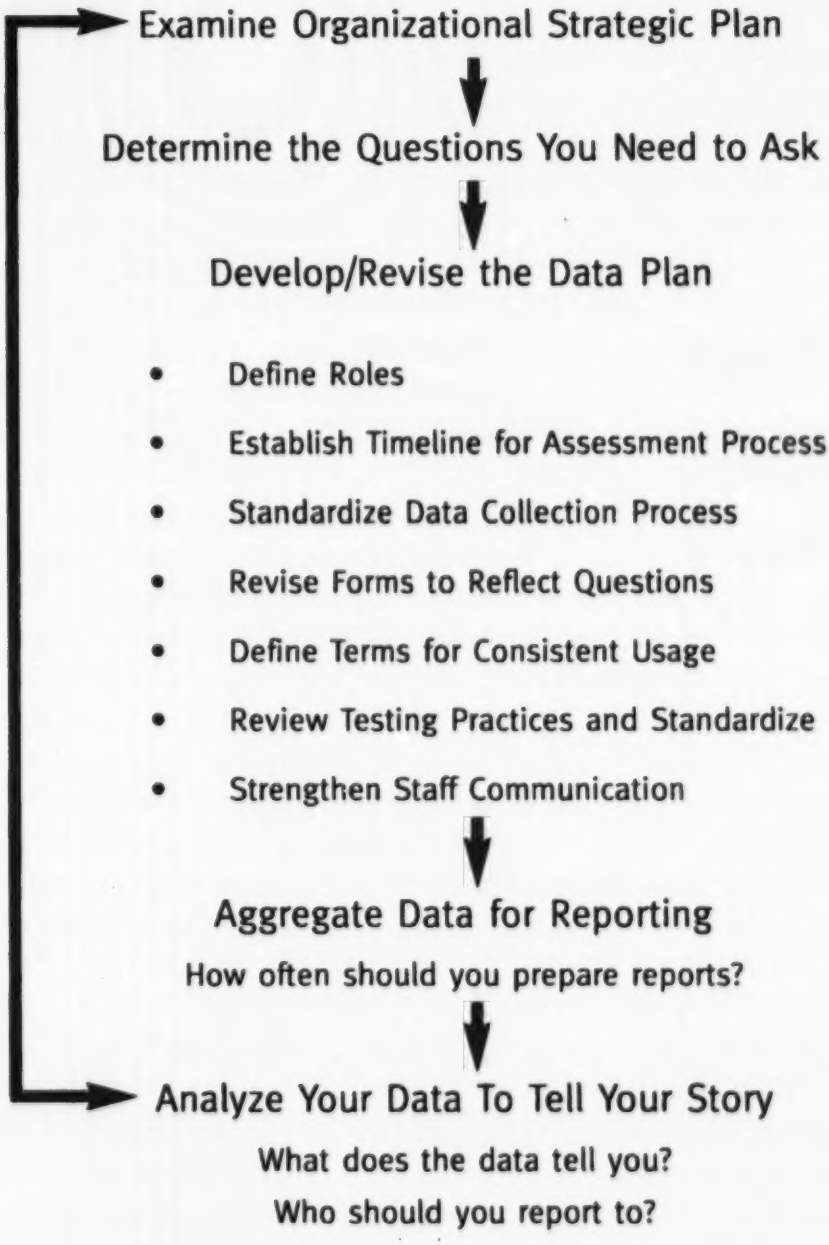
5. *Analyze your data to tell your story*
   With continual program improvement being our focus, it is critical to take the time to interpret the data that has been collected. Without this crucial step, a data collection **cycle** is not maintained; rather, it is a beginning and an end with no connection to the following year. We need to have the courage to make changes in our program, curriculum, and/or strategic plan based on insights, trends, strengths, and weaknesses in the data in order to continue the cycle.

   Recognize that you are probably never going to achieve the perfect system, but efficient standardized data collection is essential to continuous program improvement. The answers are there if you ask the right questions. With a focus on the needed elements to collect, it has helped our director and staff to be able to analyze and clearly share our story with the board of directors, funders, and other organizations.

Carol L. Gabler is an instructor for Chippewa Valley Technical College, and is the Executive Director for Literacy Volunteers of America-Chippewa Valley.

Heidi L. Fisher is the Training and Chippewa County Coordinator for LVA-CV. She has worked in this capacity for four years.

YEARLY CYCLE FOR SYSTEMATIC DATA COLLECTION


Examine Organizational Strategic Plan
Determine the Questions You Need to Ask
Develop/Revise the Data Plan
• Define Roles
• Establish Timeline for Assessment Process
• Standardize Data Collection Process
• Revise Forms to Reflect Questions
• Define Terms for Consistent Usage
• Review Testing Practices and Standardize
• Strengthen Staff Communication
Aggregate Data for Reporting
How often should you prepare reports?
Analyze Your Data To Tell Your Story
What does the data tell you?
Who should you report to?

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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